

NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN CONFERENCE

A Simple Guide for Missional Communities

■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

03.

What is a Missional Community?

05.

Why Missional Communities?

06.

How to Run a Missional Community

12.

Summary



WHAT IS A **MISSIONAL COMMUNITY**?

“Missional Communities are a group of approximately 20-40 people who are seeking to reach a particular neighbourhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus.” - Mike Breen

We understand these numbers may not work in every context, and we encourage you to work with what you have - 5-20 people would be just fine.

Missional Communities work best, when connected to an established church setting.

That said - in the context of the Northern Australian Conference (NAC), when the local context is right, we would be happy classify this group as a Church plant. It would technically be considered a “Group” within our official terms. Once the Missional Community (MC) is functioning well, it may then move to become a Company or an Organised Church in time.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF **MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Small Enough to Care, Big Enough to Dare

A Missional Community is small in number, which makes it a great place for people to belong in community.

However, unlike a small group, a Missional Community has the capacity, just by sheer numbers, to accomplish more! It does not serve as merely a pastoral group, but as a missional vehicle:

“Missional communities exist to see God’s kingdom come to their friends and neighbours” - Mike Breen



Clear Mission/Vision

Missional Communities exist to be missional. They are clear about who they are trying to make disciples of, and how they are going about it. Missional Communities often work to reach people in a certain area, or relational stream. I.e. – a school community.

Lightweight/Easy Maintenance – Missional Communities are designed in a way that they do not carry some of the burdens of an established church e.g. building maintenance and the like.

“Every effort should be put into making MCs as lightweight and low maintenance as possible. This means they are inexpensive to run, not too time consuming to plan, and not bound by building or maintenance costs. Leading a MC shouldn’t be a heavy burden on a leader. People without normal ‘9-5 jobs’ should be able to lead them.” Mike Breen

The group may decide on two paths as it grows. One, plant a new Missional Community - still connected to the established local church - that is also lightweight and easy to manage. Two, take on the form of a more traditional church plant. This will be a discussion the leadership team can have as the community grows.

Missional Communities are Accountable to the Bigger System

Missional communities will have leadership that works in the context of the bigger local church and Conference-wide system. They will be accountable as a ministry of a local church or a Seventh-day Adventist Church group.

UP/IN/OUT Rhythm

Missional Communities follow an up, in, out rhythm.

Up - is about worshipping and connecting with God.

In - is about connecting with the community of believers that comprise the Missional Community.

Out - is about serving those in the community that don’t know Jesus!

This model closely reflects the relationship Jesus had with the group of Disciples that He chose to disciple and take on Mission. Jesus intentionally established a group of disciples (Luke 6:12-16; Matthew 10:1-4). A group that:

- Worshipped together (Mark 1:21; Luke 11:1-15 - Reach UP)
- Ate together (Mark 2:13-17; Mark 14:16-17 - Reach IN)
- Did ministry together (Matt 10; Mark 9:14-2 – Reach OUT)

It should be noted that this rhythm is not about organising events with different focuses, it’s about: *“establishing rhythms and routines that allow us to become an extended family on mission together. To do this we need rhythms that connect us with God in worship and prayer (UP), with each other in deeper community (IN), and with those in our mission context in love and service (OUT)” - Mike Breen*

WHY MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES?

What We Are Doing is not Reaching Much of our Country

Philip Hughes' research has shown that - if it wasn't for immigration, the Adventist Church in Australia would have declined by around 12 % between 2016 and 2021.

National Church Life Survey (NCLS) research has shown that –

“84% of Australians do not engage with a church congregation and only 7% of Australians attend a religious service in an average week (NCLS, 2023).”

Dr Brendan Pratt and Pr Lyndelle Peterson comment on this group of people:

“The 84% is not about a particular demographic or cultural group. It includes all sorts of backgrounds that shape our multi-cultural Australia. When we talk about connecting with the ‘majority culture’, it’s the 84%.”

It’s our desire, in setting up Missional Communities, that they be used to reach the ‘majority culture’ – a group we are currently not tapping into. This, of course, doesn’t mean that there is no place for the traditional churches that have been established. This is merely a different way to take the same Gospel message to our nation.

Discipleship Focused

Although the method is slightly different from the traditional model, the desired outcome is exactly the same – that is – make Disciples. The focus of Missional Communities is that they would make disciples as Jesus has called us to:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” - Matthew 28:19-20



HOW TO RUN A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

I. Clarify the Vision

It's important that a Missional Community has a clear vision.

Like in a church plant, God will most likely give you as the leader an initial starting point, a burden. However, the members of your core group will help you flesh this out to become a "shared story of future hope."

A couple of helpful exercises for developing vision:

For you!

Seeking God – Prayerfully ask:

- God, who are you sending us to?
- God, where are you already at work?
- What is good news to this group of people?
- Understanding the burden you have:
 - What are your hearts desires?
 - What is your holy discontent?
 - What are the opportunities?

For the Group!

A helpful exercise from Jim Collins (Harvard Business Review) involves defining a "vivid description" of your vision:

"Think of it as translating the vision from words into pictures—painting an image that people can carry around in their heads. Picture-painting is essential to make a 5–10-year vision tangible."

*It's important to know who you are trying to reach. The above exercises will help you get there.

2. Pray and Recruit Your Core Team

It's advisable to work through your vision (exercise 1 above), before recruiting your core team. It doesn't have to and probably shouldn't be - completely finished – but it should be clear enough that you can describe what God is putting on your heart. The team can then help you develop this further into a "shared story of future hope."

For the core team, it's important to put this to prayer – that God would lead you to people who have a deep desire for mission – like you do.

It's ideal to have around six people to begin with. This is the team that you will invest in – for the first three to six months. You will disciple them via a huddle (more on this below)

and also plan the basis of the Missional Community – via UP, IN, OUT, Rhythms.

*Don't be disappointed if people drop out – pray on this and ask God to lead you to the right people, with the right levels of commitment.

3. Establish UP, IN, and OUT Rhythms

As noted above Missional Communities focus on:

- Reaching Up to God
- Reaching In towards each-other
- Reaching Out to others

As your core team develops the rhythms of the community, it's important to make sure these three elements are present.

Reaching Up – is all about connecting with God, together. This can be done in multiple ways. Bible study, worship session together, prayer etc. We would advise a once a week gathering where *Reaching Up* together is a primary focus. Although this could be the equivalent of a 'regular church' worship service, it doesn't have to look the same. This is where you can be creative as we reach the majority culture/whoever God puts on your heart to reach.

Consider here how your group can also be involved with broader local church and Conference initiatives like Big Camp – that would facilitate this.

Reaching In – is all about connecting with one another, as a family on mission. Again, this can be done in multiple ways. Dinner together, attend a local sports event, have a bomb fire night, have a movie night etc. As a family spend time together, spend time together.

It's crucial that this element does not just become events based. People need to genuinely feel like they are part of a family. With that, organic things like unofficial hang outs, calls, check ins etc. can, and should become common place in the communities' rhythms.

Reaching Out – Missional Communities, are not Missional Communities, if there is no Mission!

Consider how your group can do Mission in a corporate and personal way. A corporate way could include volunteering with an already established service group in the community – like ADRA or Salvos. Personal, is more about looking out for people of peace (More on this below) and living one to one missional lives - using tools like - **BLESS – by Dave Ferguson:**

B – Begin with Prayer (pray for your neighbours/Community)

L – Listen to people's stories as God brings people to you

E – Eat with people regularly

S – Serve people as opportunities arise

S – Share your story, share God's story!

A word of Caution –

You can make your Missional Community very event heavy, and non-organic. Likewise, you can make it quite organic with little structure. Both are ditches you want to avoid.

“We encourage you to think in terms of a commitment to the organised/structured aspects of a family’s life and the organic/spontaneous aspects. Think in terms of simple repeatable patterns and then review regularly to see which “ditch” (too organised, or too organic) your MC is closer to. Ask questions about members’ engagement, participation, and enjoyment of the MC. This will help you make lots of small corrections as you go rather than making massive changes all at once.” - Mike Breen

If your community is doing the following in structured and organic ways on a regular basis you are probably close to where you should be as a Missional Community:

- Eating Together
- Playing Together
- Going on Mission Together
- Praying Together
- Helping each-other

Once you have developed vision, assembled your core team, and set up what the basic UP, IN, OUT, rhythms of the Missional Community will look like – you are ready to expand the group.

*Your Rhythms will start in a certain way but these are flexible. You can work with your team and change them as you go.



4. Expand the Group

Here you are aiming for a minimum of 12-15 people.

This is a solid group that you can build on. It's a group that is big enough to dare. If it's smaller, it can be hard to get going and feel more like a small group. It can also be a little more difficult for new people – who may like to feel 'anonymous' at first to fit in.

Some people are excellent at gathering others - and building groups (people magnets). They may like to start this phase with less than 12-15 and build. If you are not this type of person, it's better to work with your core team to build a bigger group to launch with!

5. Keep Discipleship Central

It's vital that discipleship is a key focus of the Missional Community. This is central to the great commission – make disciples before Jesus comes (Matthew 28-19-20).

Consideration should be given to discipling the core team and discipling the greater group.

CORE Team –

In terms of discipling the core team, regular huddles of the six core team members, set in the context of the Missional Communities greater activities, are a great tool for this.

The main thing here is that key leaders are being disciplined so that the group does not just rely on you, as the main leader, and is set up for long-term success.

In the huddles, the group leader would guide the group through the key aspects of Discipleship, teaching things like:

- The journey of growing into Christ
- Proper use of your time as a believer
- Rhythms of work and rest in a consumer-oriented world
- Healthy Relationships (Family, marriage, pre-marital etc.)
- Making God honouring decisions
- Key teachings of the Adventist Church that will develop a strong commitment to the church, and sense of Adventist identity in your missional community
- Wise financial stewardship
- General stewardship - including that of our health
- Devotion to Mission (Sacrificial service) + more
- Spiritual Gifting – SHAPE

We are talking here about the things that really matter in a person's growth in Christ and life. Things that keep us grounded, healthy, and focused on Mission. A commitment of a year would be a good time frame for this huddle to journey together.

We know that Discipleship doesn't just happen, though, through the passing on of information. It's important to also consider that we are to also apprentice people and involve them in a culture of discipleship, or in other words, a setting that shows "this is what we do around here."

As you live the rhythms of your Missional Community (UP, IN, OUT) those you are discipling will not only hear you teach, but they will also see how you live. We know some of this will be good, and other bits not as good and that's ok! It's important that we move away from having to have it altogether as we do life on life with people.

GREATER Group –

The greater group will be discipled at first as part of the Missional Communities UP, IN, and OUT rhythms.

As the group grows, and more leaders are discipled, more small group huddles can be developed for accountability, growth, and care.

These huddles can meet weekly in homes, or during Sabbath. Again, it depends on context and time commitments. Your team can choose on this.

If the Missional Community has the capacity, discipleship care plans can also be put in place for individuals, making sure that each person is on a pathway to grow. This will come down to what the team can manage.

6. Pray for People of Peace

In his work, "If You Can Eat, You Can Make Disciples," Peter Roennfeldt draws on Luke 10:1-7 to describe what's been coined as people of peace. Note the text:

"The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.... Whenever you enter someones' Home, first say, 'May God's peace be on this house.' If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay.'"



When Jesus sent His disciples on mission in pairs, to all the places He planned to visit, He told them to look out for people who peacefully respond to the Good News message. This tells us that these people most definitely exist.

As he analyses scripture, Roennfeldt argues that these people are often:

- Receptive - *“Anyone who accepts your message is also accepting me.” Luke 10:16*

- Hospitable
“Hospitable. The first indicator that you might have found a person of peace is their welcome. They might be surprised and reactionary, but they are responsive. They might not have much to give, but what is shared is a bridge of welcome from them to you. I have received a piece of boiled pumpkin, served from a gnarled hand; a cup of tea, from a very broken and dirty cup; a glass of water; perhaps a biscuit. Whatever it is, each is an expression of hospitality and welcome.” – Peter Roennfeldt

“Jesus asked the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well for a drink of water (see John 4:7). He called Zacchaeus down from the tree, invited Himself home to ‘stay,’ and Zacchaeus ‘welcomed Him gladly’ (Luke 19:5, 6, NIV). Of course, those who are hospitable to us will also be welcoming to others, an important quality for those who will multiply disciples among their connections.” – Peter Roennfeldt

- Those who have a Reputation
“Reputation. For some it was a good and positive reputation; for others, bad, sad, and broken:

Nicodemus a Pharisee, was a member of the Jewish ruling council (see John 3:1-21)

The Samaritan woman was despised and broken (see John 4:1-2)

The Demon Possessed Gergesene was feared, crazy and violent (see Mark 5:1-20).

Zacchaeus was a “sinner” - a hated tax collecting cheat (see Luke 9:1-10).

They were all well-known - whether respected, shunned, feared, despised or hated - and when they met Jesus they had huge influence for God in their communities.” - Peter Roennfeldt

- Those who have Influence – people who are well known in their communities. See list above.

As your Missional Community starts, it’s important that we are praying for God to lead us to these sorts of people. They are people who will not only be receptive to the gospel, but also those who will open doorways in our community for the Kingdom of God to expand.

7. Bathe the Community in Prayer

“God is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” – Ephesians 3:20

Prayer is the engine behind every fruitful church plant.

Bathe your planning, recruiting, visioning, and strategy in prayer.

Invite God to open doors, close wrong ones, and lead the way.

Without Him, we can do nothing. (John 15:5)

IN SUMMARY

Missional Communities are **lightweight, relational, and deeply intentional** Gospel communities. They function as a strategic way to:

- Engage the unchurched majority in Australia
- Raise new disciples
- Multiply the Kingdom through everyday believers on mission

The goal is not to *replace* traditional churches, but to complement them with a model better suited to reaching modern Australia.



NOTES



Seventh-day
Adventist™ Church